

PARLIAMENTS AND THE POWER OF YOUNG PEOPLE: A CALL TO ACTION

Between July and August 2020, the OpenGov Youth Collective conducted a global survey to explore how young people perceive parliament and youth participation in parliamentary activities. 385 young people from 50 countries shared their views.

Drawing on the findings of this survey, the OpenGov Youth Collective proposes a series of **recommendations** for the stronger engagement of young people in and by parliaments.

WHY DOES THIS ISSUE MATTER?

Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 make up about 1.2 billion of the world's population. However, many young people have been sidelined in decision making processes at national and sub national levels, and less than 2 percent of parliamentarians worldwide are under 30 years (IPU, 2016). Youth participation in politics is critical for achieving a sustainable world and to secure a more equitable and just future for generations to come. Working together, parliaments and young people can ensure the development and implementation of policies and processes that respond effectively to the challenges faced by youth and their communities.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

A staggering 96 percent of respondents of the OpenGov Youth Collective consultation indicated strongly that political structures, norms and rules, including the monetisation of electoral processes, have become a huge barrier to youth participation in politics. These discourage young people and don't give them the room or opportunity to run for public office, including parliament.

Young people understand the role and importance of parliament as a representative and policy making institution. According to our consultation, they consider the work of parliament critical in ensuring progress in any country. However, they express great concern about the lack of openness, the dominance of political party agendas over the personal integrity of Members of Parliaments, and the limited meaningful opportunities for participation by young people.

We believe parliaments are at the core of our democracies. We hope you will consider our recommendations below and be encouraged to take action to strengthen collaboration with young people.

The OpenGov Youth Collective

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Every young person should have the right and opportunities to engage in policy making processes that impact their lives, and especially the most marginalised youth who often get left behind or left out of youth consultations; an inclusive approach is critical for ensuring policies that address the needs of all young people.

2. Consult regularly with young people to inform the development of policies and partner with young people to follow up, review and report on policy implementation to ensure strengthened accountability; consultations and reporting could be facilitated through regular surveys and in-person meetings coordinated in partnership with youth organisations and networks.

“Every parliament around the world should develop methods to collect the voices and aspirations of young people in analyzing political issues, and get them involved in the solutions as well.”

3. Establish or strengthen parliamentary online systems and processes to ensure the creation of safe and inclusive spaces for young people to access information and input their ideas and priorities; ensure that these online spaces are supported by offline outreach and consultations by parliaments to different youth constituencies.

“Young people will not be able to engage with parliament unless there is a platform/mechanism in place that they can use to confidently voice their concerns and make their needs heard. Parliament should therefore be proactive in its approach by creating/making available those platforms for young people to come together to engage with them.”

4. Parliaments should routinely invite young people to participate in parliamentary sessions and debates, collaborating closely with youth organisations and networks to identify young representatives that will bring formal positions from their youth constituencies; for example, Members of Parliament could invite a panel of young people from their district or province to share their views on development challenges or priorities in their own words.

“We have not physically participated in any parliament sitting or whatsoever discussed and formulated in the parliament. We are only informed about the results and outcomes from the discussions and decisions in the parliament that have been talked by the parliamentarians, and we only suggest our views on what we think about the decisions they have already made.”



“Democracy can only be achieved if we ensure the voices of young people - in all our diversity - are represented in institutions that have the power to implement policies and laws affecting our lives. Transparent and inclusive systems that enable young people to participate in decision making should become the norm for Parliaments, as we can help to ensure better and stronger policies that will have more sustainable results for communities.”
Francis Ametepey, Youth Speaker of Parliament - Nsawam Adoagyiri, Ghana.

5. With more men than women represented in most parliaments around the world, greater action needs to be taken to ensure the views and voices of women are included in parliamentary sessions and discussions; targeted outreach towards young women to engage them in politics and governance through school and university should be prioritised, to encourage stronger representation in the long term.

6. Invest in youth-led organisations and networks that support the participation of young people in accountability and advocacy initiatives at sub-national and national levels, to ensure that policies are effectively implemented and young people are made aware of their rights.

7. Allocate budget annually towards supporting the participation of young people in parliamentary processes, for example to support youth-led consultations or to cover the travel expenses of young people to participate in parliamentary sessions of debates; particularly more marginalised young people are not in a position to self-fund their participation and their voices are often not represented as a result.

“Opportunities for engaging with the activities of parliament are limited, and even where they exist, they are privileged for people in the capital only.”

8. Governments should establish a specific ministry on youth, with the mandate to focus on youth empowerment and employment policies. These ministries should work in close partnership with established youth-led organisations and networks to ensure policies address the needs and priorities of young populations, further ensuring that young people in all their diversity are represented and have the opportunity to inform policies affecting their lives and wellbeing.

“Setting up a Youth Empowerment and Employment Ministry or department is crucial at this time. Young people today will be our leaders tomorrow, and need to be empowered in a way that they become wise and responsible citizens and leaders in the future.”

The OpenGov Youth Collective works to extend and strengthen the active membership of young people in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) globally and through national and local Action Plans. The OGP is a multilateral initiative that aims to ensure governments become sustainably more transparent, more accountable, and more responsive to their own citizens, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of public policies and services.

This survey was conducted by the OpenGov Youth Collective with support from Restless Development, Accountability Lab & the Open Government Partnership - OGP.

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